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newspapers learned of the exodus. Just as I got in sight of the tent tops a couple of buses and several delivery wagons passed me in a cloud of dust. They carried the freaks and their impediments. Fat Florence sat with the Living Skeleton, mopping her face with a bandana handkerchief. The Hydra-Headed Boy, Ziz the What Is It, the Fire Eating Frenchman, the Cingalese Twins, the Mindanao Midget, the Strong Man, and the Snake Charmer were jammed in the remainder of the first two wagons. Grim determination and the beatific light of a holy purpose shone from their many countenances. They looked straight ahead, with never a glance at the gaping countrymen who fringed the roadway. I broke into a trot, and a minute later found Sam superintending the taking down of the sideshow tent.

"They're gone, Tom!" he muttered. "The beggars have quit! Take it from me that Human Pin cushion is some tough dame! I'd like to see her married to the Cardiff Giant!"

"One moment, Boss! Hold off on pullin' down that tent!" somebody behind us whispered.

Sam and I turned. Skinny McGee, quite out of breath, was the whisperer.

"Hold off for an hour!" he sputtered. "They'll be back—licked! An' they won't open their traps again about showin' their awful mugs in public! Leave it to me! I'll show you how I can appreciate a good turn. Just sit tight, say nothin', and wait! There'll be no rough stuff pulled. S'long, old pal! We're leavin' on the three o'clock rattler!"

Before we could say a word the gray-headed crook had disappeared through the crowd in the direction of the trolley cars.

"I'd give a day's receipts to know what that fellow is up to," snarled Harkins.

"Better take his tip and leave the tent up," I suggested. "Only a moment ago he told me he appreciated your decency in not pointing him and the gang out to the village gendarmes. Said he was looking for an opportunity to commit anything up to murder to prove his undying affection. Maybe he's going to shave the Bearded Lady, slip Florence a case of antifit pellets, or behead half of the Cingalese Twins. Only thing to do is to wait. McGee may be a crook, but he strikes me as being on the level for once in his life."

Mad as he was after an hour's wrangling with the freaks, Sam decided to listen to my footless advice. He ordered the boss canvasman to stop work on the sideshow for awhile, and together we squatted in the shade of the ticket wagon while the crowd, urged on by the colored band and two spieders, piled into the Big Show.

"Things are getting too a pretty pass," said he, "when the proprietor of a circus has to sit on the grass while a pickpocket devises and executes some unknown method of getting him out of a hole by subduing a cantankerous collection of striking misfits! We'll be lucky if we leave this town without being jailed. Didn't I tell you the circus business was not my line? Once I yank this galaxy of zoological and acrobatic nightmares back to winter quarters, if I ever do, I'm going to unload the whole shebang on somebody and do penance for my sins. I'm going to join the church, learn to play checkers, subscribe for 'The Old Ladies' Monthly,' and—Hello, Chief! What's troubling you now?"

NOTHING. Mr. Harkins. Just dropped around to see if you'd spied any of them pickpocket fellers."

"Not a sign of them, Chief. Got your folks with you? Good! How many? Tom, get eight good seats down in front on the grandstand side for the chief. Don't mention it, my dear sir! Come right in. The youngsters will enjoy seeing the animals before the show begins. If I do say it myself, this is some circus. I'll join you as soon as this crowd thins out. If I see a sign of a dip, you'll know it instantly."

He escorted the chief, Mrs. Chief, and the six little chiefs past the ticket takers, and returned to me.

"If anything is going to come off out here, we don't want him around," said he. "You'd better go in and keep him interested until the show starts. If he gets restless, tell Timkins to hurry the start. I'll stay out in front. Just as sure as the Creator constructed small green apples and had no hand in building Fat Florence, something's about to bust! I feel it!"

The chief and his family betrayed the usual interest in the menagerie; in fact, the cry "Take your seats, Ladies and Gentlemen! The Big Show is about to commence!" sounded before the little Ronadies had half finished feeding the elephant peanuts.

I sat with them until after the Grand Entrance; then excused myself and hustled to the front. Because there was no sideshow, few loiterers were at the entrance. Sam was peering out of the red wagon. He seemed unnaturally interested in something distant, and following his gaze I beheld a

gigantic cloud of dust coming up the road that led to town. It was coming fast.

"Well, I'll be—" he started to say "damned," I have no doubt; but instead leaped out of the wagon.

A sudden bedlam of yells, whoops, shrieks, moans, sobs, curses, and other indecent noises came from two dust-covered omnibuses out of which the freaks were piling.

"Well, well!" said Sam to the rabble. "Did you forget something, or are you here to see the show?"

"Oh! Oh! Mr. Harkins, we've been robbed!" shrieked the Fat Girl, her enormous bosom heaving like the billows of the sea.

"Cleaned out, tickets and all!" piped the Mindanao Midget, who was nine years old and came from Seventh-ave., New York.

"A vacuum cleaner—" gurgled one head of the Cingalese Twins.

"—couldn't have done it better!" sobbed the other.

"Pickpockets frisked us!" bawled the Peared Lady, yanking at her whiskers in a paroxysm of grief. "Pipe Flo's leg!"

Fat Florence lifted her skirts, and with naught but the naked eye we saw that the upper half of one of her rain barrel stockings had been ruthlessly ripped from its contents.

"Too bad! Too bad!" sighed Sam, and lit a cigar. "Isn't it a shame, Tom? Here all these nice freaks quit so they can see the country. And before they have traveled two miles or been gone an hour they come back broke! It's pitiful, that's what it is—pitiful!"

The baleful glare in his eye had a quieting effect on all except attenuated Arthur the Human Beanpole, who had so lost control of himself as to fall in the dust, where he seemed to be indulging in some sort of fit.

Just then a village youth carrying a bundle wrapped in a newspaper panted up to the Red Wagon. He gave a frightened stare at the clutter of curios, and asked for Mr. Harkins.

"A gent said you'd pass me into the circus if I brought you these," said he, handing over the package and an envelop.

SAM opened the letter, started to read it, and smiled for the first time that day. The smile changed to a chuckle, the chuckle to a giggle, the giggle rose to a chortle, the chortle switched to a ringing laugh, and before he had finished reading he had wound up in a string of ponderous guffaws.

"All right, young man," he spluttered when he had dried his eyes. "You go right in and see the show."

Then he leaned against the ticket wagon and laughed again. He laughed so loud and so long that the Beanpole was shocked into consciousness as the other freaks had been into silence.

"Wh-wh-what do you want to do now?" Harkins finally managed to say in the direction of the Mastodontic Maiden.

"If you please, Sir," said she, "we'd like to go back on our old jobs. We're licked, robbed, dusty, tired, and hungry. An' we don't want no more parades. Once's enough. Ain't it, Boys an' Girls?"

"Betcher life!" said Jasper the Giant.

The others bobbed their heads enthusiastically.

"All right," said Sam, ripping open the bundle the boy had handed him. "You can come back; but I think I'd better stow this stuff away in the safe."

He drew forth what looked like a huge white cotton sack tied at the top and bottom.

At the sight of it Fat Florence yelled, "My stocking! Where'd you get it?"

Sam cut one of the strings, and there fell to the ground a dozen wallets and pocketbooks and as many rolls of bills.

"Before you dash back into that tent and your lifework," said he, "I want to read you this letter. Listen!

"DEAR MR. HARKINS.—The Wells & Howe outfit may be second class, but it's too good for a bunch of imitation curiosities such as this. Fatty is enough to queer even a dog and pony show. If we missed anything, it was because the train was almost due and we had to work fast. Am sending back all the stuff we stopped from the scavengers except the tickets. We'll use the latter ourselves, as we are bound for the same town on the three o'clock.

"Trusting that we are doing you no great injustice by returning this disgusting company of scamps, we remain

"Yours for Art,

JAMES McGEE et al.

P. S.—Some underpinning Fatty's got! J.M."

"He's no gentleman!" snapped Fat Florence. "Think of it! He tipped my—

"Quick now! Get dressed for the blow-off," yelled Sam.

When the Three-Legged Man, the last in the line, had disappeared behind the tent flaps Sam chuckled a bit, tossed McGee's hand into the air, and asked me if I wanted to join him while he sat out the show with the chief. I said I didn't. I told him I thought I'd stroll over to the coochhouse and get a sandwich and a cup of coffee. I must have looked hungry; for he told me to go ahead. So I did.

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